Opening Ceremony of the UNESCO MOWCAP Centre
Asia Culture Centre (ACC), Gwangju, Republic of Korea
7 September 2016

Keynote speech by Dr Gwang-Jo Kim, Director, UNESCO Bangkok

I. Greetings

- Mr Li Minghua, Chairperson of the UNESCO Memory of the World Committee for Asia and the Pacific (MOWCAP),
- Mr Sunkyu Bang, President of ACC,
- Mr Byungsuk Kim, President of Asia Culture Institute (ACI),
- Mr Janghyun Yoon, Mayor of Gwangju Metropolitan City,
- Mr Dongseok Min, Secretary-General of the Korean National Commission for UNESCO,
- Distinguished experts,
- Ladies and gentlemen,
- Good morning.

- Let me first express my sincere gratitude to the Asia Culture Institute for inviting me to address this important ceremony on the occasion of the opening of the UNESCO Memory of the World Committee for Asia-Pacific Centre in Gwangju.

- I was in Gwangju exactly 4 years ago in May 2012 on the occasion of the World Human Rights Cities Forum organized by the Korean
National Commission for UNESCO and the Metropolitan City of Gwangju.

- As you know, Gwangju played a significant role in the development of human rights and democracy in Korea. The successful democratic uprising of the citizens of Gwangju against the military government in 1980 led the country to become a multi-party democracy in 1987.

- Officially renamed “the May 18th Democratic Uprising”, the archives and records of this event are now inscribed in the UNESCO’s Memory of the World International Register.

- Gwangju (光州), or “Bit-goeul” in Korean, means also “Village of Light”. The city, which is part of UNESCO Creative Cities Network, is renowned for its art and culture, and it is the birth place of numerous scholars, poets and artists.

- So, I am very happy to see that the UNESCO Memory of the World Committee for Asia and the Pacific has chosen the city of Gwangju in Korea for its first physical Centre.

- I am also extremely delighted to see the generous offer from the Asia Culture Centre to host the MOWCAP Centre in its premises, and to provide dedicated staff and resources for its operation.
• I am convinced that the facilities offered by the ACC for cultural exchange, research, archives and education are all extremely relevant to support the goals of UNESCO’s Memory of the World programme.

II. **MOWCAP Center as a catalyst for cooperation**

• Ladies and Gentlemen,
  Since its creation in 1992, this is the first time in the history of the UNESCO Memory of the World programme that such a Centre has been established.

• This Centre is therefore not only a major step for the programme to realize its full potential in the Asia-Pacific, but also an example for other regions of the world to follow in the implementation of the Memory of the World.

• The MOWCAP Center comes in to being at a crucial time in the history of the Memory of the World programme, with an important global review of the programme currently taking place.

• The UNESCO Director-General has outlined her vision for the Memory of the World programme as the basis for greater solidarity and cooperation between all countries.
• To quote the DG, “Today, more than ever, there is an urgent need for dialogue, respect and understanding – to preserve, promote and share humanity’s documentary heritage as a foundation for strengthening humanity as a single community, sharing a past and a future”. ¹

• The work of the Memory of the World programme will also be significant for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals which include under the Goal 16 a new target on *public access to information* and under the Goal 11 a specific target *to protect and safeguard the world’s cultural heritage*.

• And the MOWCAP Centre has an important role to play in this vision, supporting the preservation and access to the documentary heritage of common significance to us all within the region.

• The Centre is also a meeting place for all members of MOWCAP from the Asia-Pacific region. This will be a place for dialogue, discussion, the exchange of ideas, and friendship.

• Indeed, I believe what has made the MOWCAP one of the most successful global bodies for Memory of the World has been the cooperation and friendship that has been forged between people from across the region.

UNESCO looks forward to working with MOWCAP to continue this important work.

III. Overview of documentary heritage in Asia-Pacific and challenges of preservation

Ladies and gentlemen, the Asia-Pacific region is home to rich and diverse documentary heritage.

There are currently 46 items inscribed in the Memory of the World Asia Pacific Regional Register, and 91 items among the 357 items inscribed in the Memory of the World International Register are from the Asia-Pacific region.

This includes great moments of historic change such as the invention of modern feature film illustrated by the film Story of the Kelly Gang (p 30) from Australia, the achievement of universal suffrage for women in New Zealand (p 96) or the invention of moveable metal type illustrated by the oldest printed book “Jikji” in Korea (p 114).

It also contains records on the advancement of scientific and medical knowledge through the Collection of the Al-Biruni Institute of Oriental Studies in Uzbekistan (p 138), the Chinese encyclopedia Ben Cao Gang Mu of traditional medicine (p 36) or the medical encyclopedia Donguibogam from Korea (p 116).
• It reflects the development of languages and scripts in the history of the nations. For example the Hunmin Chongum Manuscript (p 120) illustrates the introduction of hangul as a new script for the writing of Korean which is still used today. In Thailand the King Ram Khamhaeng Inscription (p 136) also illustrates the oldest surviving writing in Thai language and script which constitutes the foundation of Thai history and culture.

• At the heart of all this, stands the struggle for human rights and dignity from the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum Archive (p 32) to the Mabo Case Manuscripts in Queensland in Australia (p 26).

• The documentary heritage captures waves of influence across borders such as the Al-Masaalik Wa Al-Mamaalik from Iran which presents a detailed description of socio-economic, cultural and political conditions of the Islamic lands at that time from India to Africa². The arrival of Islam into South-East Asia is also described on the Inscribed Stone of Terengganu in Malaysia (p 84). Cross cultural traditions are also recorded such as the Tajik-Persian literature of “Kulliyat” and "Gazalliyt" from Tajikistan (p 130).

• But it also includes the records of common traditions in the region such as the public examination system for civil servants in China (p 40) or in Vietnam (p 142), a system which then spread to Europe and United States in the mid-19th century.

All this documentary heritage takes many different forms: from manuscripts and woodblocks, to paintings, photographs, sound recordings and films. And this is a source of inspiration and opportunities for learning, creating, sharing, and exchanging.

Preserving this heritage is a never ending task. It requires continuous deliberate effort to preserve for the benefit of future generation.

In the words of Dr Ray Edmondson, the former Chair of MOWCAP (NB – Ray Edmondson will be in the room) “Nothing has ever been preserved – it is only being preserved.”

It is only through the continuous commitment and effort of all Member States for the preservation of documentary heritage, and universal access to it, that the objectives of UNESCO’s Memory of the World programme will be able to be achieved.

I believe that the establishment of the MOWCAP Centre is a concrete step for sustaining the commitment of all UNESCO Member States in the region to the goals of Memory of the World and I sincerely congratulate you all for this great achievement.
IV. Opportunities and challenges of preservation in digital era

- Ladies and Gentlemen, the MOWCAP Center also comes in to being in one of the most challenging but also exciting times in the history of the preservation of documentary heritage.

- According to data from the International Telecommunication Union the number of ‘Individuals using the Internet’ in the Asia-Pacific region has increased from 344 million in 2005, to 1724 million in 2016\(^3\). A jump of over 400 percent!

- This creates amazing opportunities for us to utilize ICTs to promote access to the significant collections of documentary heritage across the region and make it available to more and more people.

- Through ICTs documentary heritage in the region can be utilized for new purposes. For example, digitized information from the archives can be made available for educational settings, enhancing the leaning process for students in the region by accessing these important archives and records.

- Children in Korea can learn about the universal suffrage for women in New Zealand through the registered records, while children in New Zealand can learn about oldest printed book “Jikji” in Korea!

---

• In this regard, I note with interest the newly redeveloped MOWCAP website which is an important portal for accessing information about the programme. I also understand that the MOWCAP Center will be engaged in further enhancing and developing content for this important tool.

• I urge all MOWCAP members to continue your work of developing new ways where ICTs can be harnessed to make documentary heritage more available to the public.

• But as you all know, with the raise of born-digital information, the challenge of preservation has become very complex and as important as ever.

• The volume and the complexity of digital information raises new challenges for its long term preservation and accessibility.

• Carriers like CD-ROMs, hard disk drives or flash storage have all limited lifespans. And even if the data is stored, there is a risk that current hardware and software cannot process the old stored data because of the rapid change of technology.

• If today’s digital records are not available in the future or are changed, the possibility to research and investigate the history and current state of our world will be compromised.
• So there is a need to ensure the availability, accessibility and integrity of information for as long as it is required.

• Existing policy and legal frameworks such as copyright and legal deposit legislation which guide the preservation practices in the analogue environment will also need reform to keep pace with the evolving and expanding digital preservation needs.

• The challenge of digital preservation cannot be tackled solely by the traditional memory institutions such as libraries, museums, archives, etc.

• It requires close collaboration between memory institutions, governments and ICT-industry.

V. The Importance of the UNESCO Recommendation Concerning the Preservation of, and Access to, Documentary Heritage Including in Digital Form

• The call for a greater collaboration between memory institutions, governments and ICT-industry is also highlighted in the recently adopted UNESCO Recommendation Concerning the Preservation of, and Access to, Documentary Heritage Including in Digital Form.
• The adoption of the Recommendation by the UNESCO General Conference marks a milestone in UNESCO’s work towards preservation of documentary heritage.

• The Recommendation lays the foundation for the development of a comprehensive policy for Member States on the preservation of documentary heritage and for the development of international standards in this area.

• Regional and sub-regional cooperation and exchanges of good practices are instrumental in supporting Member States to successfully implement the Recommendation.

• As such, the creation of the MOWCAP Centre as a regional hub to raise public awareness on the significance of documentary heritage, including in the digital form, and to promote the Memory of the World programme is incredibly timely and critical.

• Ladies and Gentlemen, UNESCO is deeply committed to support Member States in the Asia-Pacific region, particularly Least Developed Countries and Small Island Developing States to safeguard their documentary heritage.

• This is why UNESCO has initiated a project, with support from the Government of Malaysia, to create a regional ‘action plan’ for the implementation of the UNESCO Recommendation concerning the
Preservation of, and Access to Documentary Heritage, including in Digital Form (2015).

- We hope that these actions will provide a clear path on how we can best utilize and benefit this important normative instrument which can be of benefit to all members of MOWCAP in their crucial work to safeguard and provide access to the rich documentary heritage of our region.

- In mid-2017, UNESCO will hold an important seminar focusing on the implementation of the UNESCO Recommendation in region and I would therefore like to invite all MOWCAP members to join in this important event.

VI. Concluding remarks

- With the creation of the MOWCAP Centre, the Memory of the World Committee for Asia and the Pacific is not just a network of committed experts who operate in a voluntary basis.

- The Committee is now firmly established in Asia-Pacific with an office, dedicated staff and resources.

- The extent to which the MOWCAP Centre’s operation is sustained will depend on the goodwill and commitment of all of us and I look forward to our strengthened cooperation in the coming years.
• I would like to thank you all the members of MOWCAP, staff of ACC and ACI, the Gwangju city, the Korean National Commission for UNESCO and all experts present today for your endless efforts to make this happen.

• Thank you again for giving me the opportunity to address the opening today.